

unacceptable risk of U.S. first use of nuclear weapons against those forces. Moreover, I was implying that we could do so in confidence that the Soviets would not respond with their own plentiful short-range nuclear weapons, because we would then exploit our “nuclear superiority” in strategic weapons to disarm and destroy the Soviet Union itself.

How could I have failed to notice or recall, over the years, these implications of my own speech-drafting in the fall of 1961? Well, I have to conclude, the same way most humans manage not to recognize or remember discordant or unpleasant aspects or consequences of their own behavior. Like everyone I worked with (with the possible exception of Abe Chayes), I wanted to hold on to West Berlin. At the same time, like my closest colleagues, I would have been appalled to achieve this goal by initiating nuclear war on any scale. Yet—without making a deal with Khrushchev to recognize East Germany, something not within my ken—there was *never* any way to safeguard Berlin from Soviet conventional and nuclear-armed forces in East Germany except to *threaten* nuclear weapons and express a readiness to escalate to a nuclear first strike.

So far as I was concerned, that ought to have been a total bluff. But in the giddy euphoria of the new intelligence, it seemed to me a bluff that was sure to work. That made it easy for me not to notice, or to forget, that it was, after all, a first-use and first-strike nuclear threat.

That did not go unnoticed in the Soviet Union. The day after Gilpatric’s speech, Minister of Defense Rodion Malinovsky told the Twenty-Second Congress of the Communist Party in Moscow that

[Gilpatric had] addressed a meeting of the Business Council⁹⁰ in Virginia, presumably not without President Kennedy’s knowledge, and, brandishing the might of the United States, threatened us with force. What is there to say to this latest threat, to this petty speech? Only one thing: *the threat does not frighten us!*

They are threatening to reply with force to our just proposals for a Germany peace treaty and the ending of the abnormal situation in West Berlin.... A realistic assessment of the picture